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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000246

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/C AND INL/C
JUSTICE FOR IA PATRICIA PETTY
TREASURY FOR FINCEN
NDJAMENA FOR TIERNAN
LAGOS FOR LEGATT

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TAGS: [KCOR](#) [KTFN](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CM](#)
SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S FIU HEAD SAYS COORDINATION IMPROVING,
CORRUPTION STILL RAMPANT

REF: A. 08 YAOUNDE 1034
[1](#)B. 08 YAOUNDE 546
[1](#)C. 08 YAOUNDE 119
[1](#)D. 07 YAOUNDE 1466

Classified By: Political Officer Tad Brown for Reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Corruption remains pervasive at the highest levels of the Government of Cameroon, but there are signs of increasing cooperation among the Ministry of Justice, the police and Cameroon's financial intelligence unit, the National Agency for Financial Investigations (ANIF), according to Hubert Nde Sambone, ANIF's Director. In a March 11 conversation with Poloff, Sambone said he had evidence that Minister of Defense Remy Ze Meka was trading millions of dollars of weapons and explosives throughout the Central African region, but that he was afraid to transmit the evidence for fear of reprisals against his family. Sambone welcomed USG efforts to strengthen ANIF through bilateral training and the World Bank's StAR initiative. End summary.

Corruption, Financial Crimes and Arms Smuggling

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff and Sambone have discussed corruption in Cameroon for more than two years (ref c), but Sambone said he was still overwhelmed by the prevalence of corruption throughout the government and found new evidence of corruption wherever he looked. Sambone said he had reviewed documents from the Ministry of Finance and found that treasury officials were embezzling millions of dollars and covering their tracks with thinly disguised falsified documents, most often for fictive tenders. After submitting a file on an individual to the prosecutor, for example, Sambone later learned that the prosecutor contacted the suspect and demanded a 100,000,000 CFA (about \$200,000) bribe to resolve the case.

[1](#)3. (C) In response to Poloff's query about Minister of Defense Remy Ze Meka, Sambone said he had compiled numerous dossiers detailing Ze Meka's corruption but that he was afraid to transfer them to the Ministry of Justice because Ze Meka is "powerful and dangerous, and I fear for my family and my children." Sambone said he submitted to the Ministry of Justice and to the Presidency a dossier proving that a Cameroonian national, Montampamb Bilong (phonetic), was trading millions of dollars of arms (including explosives) in Cameroon and in the Central African region (mentioning specifically Congo). Sambone said he knew Ze Meka was behind

Montampamb, but that he did not date explicitly say so in his file, instead encouraging judicial authorities to pursue "further investigations" to ascertain Montapamb's backing. Sambone said this arms-smuggling operation is separate from an earlier arms smuggler he had flagged for the USG (ref d).

14. (C) Sambone said ANIF had completed a thorough dossier on the Albatross scandal (ref b) and that there was no doubt that Yves Michel Fotso, using a long line of dummy companies, had orchestrated the disappearance of millions of dollars meant to purchase a new airplane, moving the funds from Cameroon to the U.S. through Europe and then to Singapore. Sambone thankfully accepted Poloff's offer to let an ANIF investigator review files that Fotso and another Cameroonian implicated in the scandal had furnished to the Embassy in an attempt to clear their names.

Coordination Improving

15. (C) Sambone said ANIF's relationship with the Ministry of Justice, including with Minister Amadou Ali himself, had improved tremendously in recent months, in part thanks to the US Embassy's efforts to convince Ali of the need to engage with ANIF for investigations of corruption. Sambone said a prosecutor in Douala sent a formal investigatory request to ANIF in the weeks following the training carried out at the US Embassy by officials from Justice and FINCEN, the first time that an official from Cameroon's justice system had seized ANIF with a request. Sambone said Ali himself had recently sent a file requesting ANIF's assistance, a significant step in light of Ali's previous skepticism about

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ANIF's credibility (ref a and previous).

Asset Recovery, USG Assistance and the StAR Initiative

16. (C) Poloff told Sambone that the USG encouraged Cameroon to engage with the World Bank's Stolen Assets Recovery (StAR) Initiative as a way to improve the GRC's capacity to recover stolen assets, but was disappointed to learn that the National Anticorruption Commission (CONAC) had been tapped by the GRC's Presidency to take the lead on the StAR Initiative. Sambone agreed with Poloff's assessment that CONAC does not possess the capacity or authority to lead the multiple agencies that would need to engage for StAR to succeed and that ANIF and the Minister of Justice should seek to assert themselves in the planned visit of StAR officials in mid-April.

Lack of Trained Magistrates Hampers Effort

17. (SBU) Sambone said the fight against financial crimes is severely hampered by the lack of magistrates with training or experience in dealing with financial crimes, especially money laundering. In Cameroon's system, magistrates have no specialized training and so will deal with cases as diverse as child trafficking and murder. Sambone said he had proposed to Ali that ANIF conduct a training of a core group of magistrates who could then function like a task force, handling all cases of financial crimes. Sambone said he was frustrated that magistrates were unable to obtain convictions, even in cases where Cameroon's money laundering laws were easily applicable.

Comment: Even The Longest Journeys Begin with a Step

18. (C) We are dismayed, but no longer surprised, by Sambone's accounts of pervasive corruption throughout the

GRC. We are shocked, but no longer surprised, by the allegations that Ze Meka is not only greedy and corrupt but also dangerous and potentially destabilizing. We are surprised, and pleasantly so, to learn that Ali has dropped his heretofore stubborn refusal to enlist ANIF's specialized talents in his anti-corruption investigations. We should be vigilant to ensure USG cooperation is not manipulated to advance anyone's narrow political agenda (Biya's or Ali's), but the USG's engagement can continue to help transform Cameroon's anti-corruption slogans into effective law enforcement action. Although it is possible that we will work to strengthen Cameroon's anti-corruption capacity only to see political considerations undermine our corruption allies, it is all but a certainty that, if we do not engage with those, like Sambone, who are committed to fighting corruption, their efforts will fail.

GARVEY